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The Moral Economy of Civic Food Networks in Manchester

KATERINA PSARIKIDOU AND BRONISLAW SZERSZYNSKI

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Abstract. In recent years, diverse organizations and actors in and around cities have been articulating visions of a more sustainable and democratic urban agri-food system. By utilizing or supporting alternative methods of production, distribution and consumption, a range of municipal, charitable and grass-roots initiatives have experimented with new relationships between producers and consumers, and between people, food and soil. This article provides an analysis of ‘civic food networks’ in the city of Manchester using the idea of the ‘moral economy’ and its various conceptualizations, both within and beyond agri-food studies. We argue that contemporary alternative agri-food economic practices constitute a moral economy organized around relations of solidarity and justice with proximate and distant others, and ethical concern for land and for the global environment. We explore the particular characteristics of the moral economy of these networks. We focus in particular on the complex character of moral sentiments in modern life, in which face-to-face and mediated relations are experienced in terms of different styles of morality and solidarity. We thus suggest a reconceptualization of civic food networks as a moral economy, explore the way it is conditioned by the character of morality in modern societies, and explore its potential to contribute to a wider societal transformation of the agri-food system.

Introduction

Recently, diverse organizations and actors from different backgrounds in and around cities have advanced, and frequently prefigured, visions of a more sustainable and democratic urban agri-food system (Koc et al., 1999; Lang, 1999; Murdoch et al., 2000). By utilizing or supporting alternative methods of production, distribu-

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tion and consumption, a diversity of municipal, charitable and grass-roots initiatives have been constructing new relationships between producers and consumers, and between people, food and soil. The term 'alternative agri-food networks' (AAFNs) has been coined to describe such initiatives, and concepts such as re-localization, re-spatialization, re-socialization and reconnection have been used to depict the socio-spatial and socio-material dimensions embodied in these alternatively sustainable agri-food practices (Renting et al., 2003; Levidow and Psarikidou, 2011; Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012).

A number of studies have examined the dense set of social meanings and functions of food. Concepts such as social embeddedness (e.g. Hinrichs, 2000), economic geographies of regard (e.g. Lee, 2000), the ethics of care (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Kneafsey et al., 2008), the place of caring, resistance and hope (e.g. Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Murdoch et al., 2000), the ethics of organic (e.g. Clarke et al., 2008), the moral economies of food (e.g. Jackson et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2006; Trentmann, 2007), ethical foodscapes (Goodman et al., 2010) and moral taskscapes (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012) have all been used to depict the social and ethical dimensions of AAFNs. Driven by a growing moral questioning, mistrust amongst consumers and a pressure towards 'requalification' (Murdoch et al., 2000; Murdoch and Miele, 2004) with regard to the conventional food system and its products (Gronow and Ward, 2001),¹ AAFNs have also been described as humanizing trade relations between producers and consumers (Raynolds, 2004) and as 'enabl[ing] relationships of aid and trust between producer and consumer, eliding the faceless intermediaries hidden within commodity chains and industrial foods' (Allen et al., 2003, p. 64). They have also been approached as new forms of political association and market governance (Whatmore et al., 2003) that could open up a potential for a greater democratization of agri-food processes (Lang, 1999).

Inspired by this academic work, we aim to explore the ways in which food can come to serve as 'an expression of cumulative moral sentiment' (Little et al., 2010, p. 1800). In particular, drawing on ongoing research (see Psarikidou, 2012), as well as research carried out for the EU FAAN Project,² we aim to provide an analysis of civic food networks in the city of Manchester, employing the political economic discourse of the 'moral economy' and its various theoretical articulations both within and beyond agri-food studies (Thompson, 1971; Sayer, 2000). After exploring the different conceptualizations of the term, and the distinctive character of morality in modern societies, we discuss the particular moral-economic characteristics of the civic food networks of the city of Manchester. We will argue that contemporary alternative agri-food economic practices constitute a moral economy organized around relations of solidarity and justice with proximate and distant others, concern for land and for the global environment, social inclusion of the disadvantaged, and the reskilling of everyday life, thus going beyond a narrow understanding of economic value (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Graeber, 2001). However, we also aim to identify the ways in which the moral economy of these networks is conditioned by the character of morality in modern societies, and argue for the former's potential to contribute to a wider societal transformation of the agri-food system.

Conceptualizing the Moral Economy: Agri-food Studies and Beyond

Throughout human history, economic activity has been an integral part of human societies. But, as far as is known, until the modern period economic conduct was

not differentiated from other social functions. A low division of labour, reciprocal solidarity and redistribution of surpluses among community members were all features of a community-governed economic order that was embedded in institutions, traditions and norms (Polanyi, 1957; Booth, 1994). As Booth describes (1994), in this traditional 'moral economy' the human interchange with nature was so submerged in social relations, the securing of livelihood so embedded in non-economic institutions, and economic systems so intermingled with the non-economic, that economic activities could not be separated from the wider moral universe of action. However, it has been argued that, with the advent of industrialization and the emergence of capitalist relations of production, there occurred a shift from a moral economy to a demoralized economic order. According to Polanyi (1957), this was a 'great transformation', which involved an increasing disembeddedness of economic relations from social relations and the replacement of the primacy of the collective with individualism (ibid.; Weber, 1978). 'Economics' evolved into an independent science investigating law-like phenomena (Booth, 1994), and economic actors were conceptualised as *Homo oeconomicus* (Booth, 1994), 'rational', calculative actors, whose only desire was the pursuit of material gain and the maximisation of their utility (Stehr et al., 2006). Money prevailed as a universal equivalent that, according to Simmel (1990), encouraged the commoditization of all aspects of social life and, especially, according to Marx (1978), the commoditization of objects and human labour and the reduction of their value to monetary value.

However, E.P. Thompson and James Scott were among the first to describe moral economies that existed in parallel and in tension with this new, market-led capitalist economic order. The moral economy of the eighteenth-century English crowd described by Thompson (1971) was primarily a response to the basic needs of the local community, and especially of the poor in times of scarcity.³ Thompson argues that the frequent bread and food riots of that period were spontaneous reactions against the growing practice amongst merchants of raising their prices in times of dearth, and were attempts to preserve the traditional, paternalistic moral economy of feudal society against the rising logic of the market. In Scott's (1976) analysis of the moral economy that lies behind peasant rebellions in twentieth-century southeast Asia, he uses concepts such as 'subsistence ethic', 'safety-first', 'risk-aversion', 'crisis security' and 'family security', 'equal distribution of hunger' and 'the survival of the weakest' to describe the peasants' common definition of social and economic justice. Seeking to minimize the subjective probability of a future maximum loss, these moral economies seem to preclude a narrow focus on market price and profit (Wolf, 1969; Scott, 1976). Based on the traditional rights and obligations that regulated exchange relations within a village community,⁴ it reinforced a particular normative order of village egalitarianism grounded in relationships of reciprocity and moral solidarity. Even in the cases of patron–patronage, landlord–tenant relationships, as part of the norm of reciprocity and of peasants' social right to subsistence, the landlord was expected to meet specific paternalist obligations that would guarantee the community's minimal social rights with regard to existential dilemmas arising from economic uncertainty.

Such studies set up a clear contrast between the moral economies of traditional, agrarian societies, and the relatively demoralized modern capitalist economy. However, in his attempt to 'humanize' economics, Andrew Sayer (2000) draws on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*,⁵ and William Booth's more recent understanding of *all* economies as moral economies (1994),⁶ to argue for a re-conceptualization of

the moral economy. Sayer argues that, like other activities, economic activities are structured by moral dispositions and norms – but that these dispositions and norms are also compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures (Sayer, 2000, p.2). Despite the general criticism of capitalism as the main force displacing moral and traditional norms in structuring society, for Sayer (2006) some form of moral valuation is always present or at least latent within economic relations. He thus suggests that all contemporary economies – even capitalist ones – can be considered as moral economies, as they are inevitably embedded in moral judgements and claims that could be mobilized to justify or criticize different social and economic practices. In this way, value is not only reduced to monetary value and price. Following the anthropological understanding of value and commodities of Mauss (1967) and Appadurai (1994), values in economic relations reflect the meaning or importance that a society ascribes to any object that someone can acquire in exchange for something else. In other words, values can embrace various social and cultural dimensions depending on the different monetary forms and contexts in which they are deployed (Zelizer, 1989; Dodd, 1998; Graeber, 2001). Thus, as North describes, money is no more than a ‘discourse, a social construction’ that can actually take different, better forms that can ‘value people’s work and effort before profitability’ (2007, p. xii).

So what are the characteristics of the moral economy of contemporary civic food networks? In particular, how do the forms of morality that arise in modern society differ from those of the traditional, agrarian cultures described by Thompson and Scott, and how does this affect the character of contemporary moral economies?

Morality and Modern Society

Morality is a crucial feature of human – and particularly social – existence; nevertheless, despite a small but growing literature in the sociology and anthropology of morality (e.g. Hitlin and Vaisey, 2010; Fassin, 2012), there is not even a broad agreement on how to study and theorize morality as an empirical phenomenon. However, drawing on a range of sources in sociology and anthropology, both classical and contemporary, it is possible to broadly summarize the distinctive features of the morality of specifically *modern* societies. First, modern morality is more pluralistic than that of traditional societies. In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1964), Durkheim argued that in pre-modern societies, with their low division of labour and little mutual dependency, members of society are bound together by a ‘collective conscience’ of shared beliefs and values, periodically revived through ritual. In contrast, in modern urbanized society, with its developed division of labour, urbanization, geographical mobility and social and cultural diversity, collective conscience is weak, and behaviour is regulated more through the moral sentiments and reasoning of individual subjects. Furthermore, in modern complex societies different social groups have different habituses (Bourdieu, 1986) and structures of feeling (Williams, 1977), producing divergent moral reactions to ‘objectively’ similar life situations. In their daily lives, individuals also typically move through different contexts, spaces and social networks (such as home and work, private and public), in which different moral codes apply. The modern self thus finds itself potentially drawing on a number of different ‘sources’ (Taylor, 1989) and ‘styles’ (Tipton, 1982) in trying to make moral sense of any given situation.

Second, however, a key modern moral style is one that is individualized and rational. Durkheim’s account of the ‘organic solidarity’ characteristic of societies with

a high division of labour describes it as involving a 'cooler' version of ethics, one predicated on rationally justifiable moral codes (Durkheim, 1964). With its roots in the Protestant reformation and the Enlightenment, Charles Taylor (1989) describes this current of modern morality as an ethics of 'disengaged reason', a post-conventional ethical style that tends to manifest as austere ethics of autonomy, duty, responsibility and self-restraint, focusing on obligations to concrete individuals rather than invoking wider ideas of collectivity.

Third, however, in modern society, such rational moral styles are joined by more 'expressivist' ones. Taylor sees this particular ethical orientation, one that focuses on emotion, creativity and ideas of inner and outer nature, as having arisen in reaction to the limitations of the ethics of disengaged reason. The resulting ethics of benevolence, compassion and individual self-realization have their roots in eighteenth-century Pietism with its emphasis on sensibility and emotion (Campbell, 1987), and in nineteenth-century romanticism with its valorization of the individual in communion with a wild but benign nature and its notion of 'natural', unforced morality (Taylor, 1989). Such moral styles became more widespread after the 1960s, due to an expressivist reaction amongst the young against the dominant moral culture of modern urban society, with its utilitarian and duty-based moralities and its compartmentalization of private and public (Tipton, 1982).

Fourth, despite the complexity of contemporary society and the individualized nature of its morality, more solidaristic moral styles based on social similarity still persist in modern complex societies, and can even be generated by modern conditions. Studies of urban community in the mid-twentieth century revealed the existence of working- and middle-class 'urban villages' with strong bonds and shared norms within major cities in the USA and UK (Young and Willmott, 1957; Gans, 1967). In more recent decades, Michel Maffesoli and Kevin Hetherington described what they saw as a decline of individualism in modern urban life, and a growth of new elective sociations consisting of people with shared beliefs and lifestyles and strong affectual bonds – what Eugen Schmalenbach called 'Bünde' (Hetherington, 1994) and Maffesoli 'neo-tribes' (Maffesoli, 1996).

Fifth, modern conditions can also give rise to new forms of generalized felt solidarity for humankind, in the absence of any specific relations of similitude. Durkheim himself suggested the possibility of the creation of new kinds of more culturally thick versions of organic solidarity among socially diverse individuals, based on the recognition or even 'worship' of what they still had in common: their humanity. Durkheim called the latter 'the cult of man' or 'the religion of humanity', describing it as 'the only remaining bond among members of a single human group... that they are all men' [sic] (Durkheim, 1951). In the late twentieth century the mediated character of contemporary society created more favourable conditions for feelings of communion with distant others and humanity as a whole, through images such as those of the earth from space or the 'family of man', and mediated events such as sporting events, natural disasters and political ceremonial (Franklin et al., 2000; Szerszynski and Urry, 2002).

Sixth, in modern society such solidaristic moral sentiments across social and cultural difference have also found institutionalized expression at the contractual or state level (see Prainsack and Buyx, 2011); for example, in the form of charitable and campaigning organizations within civil society. Recent studies have also used the concept of contractual solidarity as a way of understanding the emergence of the modern welfare state, with its emphasis on the interdependency of the individual

and the social whole, and the legal organization and enforcement of solidarity, by the state (Bayertz, 1999; Houtepen and Meulen, 2000; Meulen et al., 2010). This could be described as a modern, bureaucratic version of the landlords' paternalist obligation to protect the community's minimal social rights with regard to existential dilemmas (Thompson, 1971; Scott, 1976) – but one that focuses not on personal obligations but the regulation of population-level, statistical phenomena (Foucault, 2003).

Seventh, in modern society, morality can also take the form of a project for societal or individual transformation. Medieval society was organized around an organic metaphor, in which morality and politics focused on the conservative task of preserving the 'body politic'. But the Reformation – particularly Puritanism – introduced the idea that morality could take the form of a purposive and programmatic attempt to reform society according to what were understood as objective moral criteria (Walzer, 1968). While collective projects to transform society according to a moral vision persist as an important feature of contemporary morality, under late-modern conditions this 'project' orientation can as often manifest at the personal level, with 'self-reflexive' individuals (Giddens, 1990) choosing by which codes and patterns they live their lives (Heelas, 1996).

In the analysis section, we will show how such features of modern morality can help us understand the distinctiveness of contemporary agri-food moral economies. Using material from interviews with citizens operating at different levels of the alternative foodscape of Manchester (see 'The Networks' section), participant observation of various trading and community food-growing practices, and internet sources, we analyse the meanings attributed to different agri-food practices by a specific body of people. In developing our analysis, we collected evidence stemming from examples of discourses and practices and categorized them according to our literature review of different moral discourses of modernity. By isolating these ideal types of discourse, we show how actors employ a range of moral styles to describe and justify their involvement in different alternative agri-food practices, suggesting that civic food networks can serve as sites for the cultivation of new moral discourses and sentiments which have the potential to effect a wider transformation of agri-food practices.

The Moral Economy of Civic Food Networks in Manchester

Background

With expanding urban populations in many parts of the world, a growing concern about food insecurity, poverty, and malnutrition has resulted in alternative agri-food strategies in and around many cities (FAO, 2007). In relatively affluent settings like the UK, issues such as the environmental and health impacts of industrial agriculture and the global trade in foodstuffs has helped to stimulate citizens' interest in alternative systems of food production, distribution and consumption. Furthermore, civic food networks have benefited from a cultural reaction in parts of society against the way that the conventional food system excises the direct experience and understanding of food origin, quality, and preparation – a manifestation of modernity's wider tendency toward the deskilling of everyday life and the 'sequestration of experience' in relation to external nature (Giddens, 1991).

Our analysis, based on ongoing research, as well as research carried out in 2008–2009, focuses on Manchester, one of the UK's largest cities.⁷ The traditional economic

dependence on industrialization and commerce,⁸ as well as the current shift of the regional economic strategy toward finance, the knowledge economy and the creative industries, have significantly slowed agricultural development in the region. Significant inequalities and social exclusion are also apparent from indicators such as those relating to employment, education and health; many of the city's residents – particularly women, disabled people, black and minority ethnic communities, young and older people – are described as excluded from a reasonable quality of life (Manchester City Council, 2011a).⁹ As for the agri-food sector, very few residents of Manchester are currently employed in agriculture; food retailing prevails as the most important part of the food chain in the Manchester economy, and many residents are also employed by large food-manufacturing companies (Food Futures, 2007). But many of the specific challenges faced by Manchester relate directly or indirectly to the contemporary agri-food system and, as we shall see, have given birth to a number of civic networks that operate in a diverse range of spaces across the city and that in different ways use food as a focus in their responses to these urban challenges.

The Networks

The networks under investigation consist of urban agri-food initiatives where citizens are the driving force in the development of new forms of production–consumption relations and active engagement with food. Taking different forms such as voluntary associations, cooperatives, charities and non-profit organizations, and employing alternative methods of production and distribution, these initiatives enact the local community's aspirations for a more environmentally sustainable agri-food system.¹⁰ They also perform collectively the space of the city and the agency of an active food citizenship in different ways – through moralized and embodied interactions with food, with the land, and with humans and non-humans both proximate and distant (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012).

In practice, it is difficult to draw a clear dichotomy between institution-led and citizen-led initiatives. The active engagement of consumers and citizens is often the outcome of a co-production between public institutions, non-profit or charitable organizations and the public, as the first two help to create the conditions under which 'food citizen' agency can flourish. For example:

- Manchester Food Futures (MFF) is a local authority strategic partnership, and has a central role in coordinating and supporting 'bottom-up' sustainable agri-food initiatives. Following its Community Strategy of 'making Manchester more sustainable' by 2015 (Food Futures, 2007), MFF is providing and supporting opportunities for residents and local organizations to get involved in projects, training, activities and events around sustainable food.
- The Kindling Trust is a not-for-profit social enterprise with charitable aims. With the objective of practising and demonstrating 'sustainable production, living and activism', it has developed a series of projects in collaboration with other groups and individuals with the goal of creating a sustainable local food system in Manchester (Kindling Trust, 2012).
- Unicorn Grocery is a workers' cooperative grocery store. It donates 5% of its turnover to projects consistent with its principles, and has also been instrumental for encouraging cooperative relations among local food businesses and co-

operatives, as well as among citizens interested in food (Unicorn, 2009; interview AL080908).

- The Association for Manchester Allotments Societies (AMAS) supports the city's local allotment societies – which in turn allocate allotments of land to individuals for the growing of food – and its horticultural societies.

Around these initiatives has coalesced a wider network of new and existing 'bottom-up' local food initiatives that operate in different parts of the chain, and that together constitute a wider moral economy of food in the city. Thus, rather than focusing solely on citizen-led, civic food networks, in this article we explore a selection of interconnected initiatives that operate at three different levels: 1. citizens as consumers, 2. citizens as producers, and 3. producers and traders as citizens – all of which, as will be shown below, exhibit an engagement with local food motivated by principles beyond material needs and personal interest and objectives:

- a. Citizens as consumers:
 - Herbie Van, a mobile greengrocery set up by the independent charity Manchester Environmental Resource Centre (MERCi) and funded by MFF, providing affordable, fresh produce in areas of Manchester with low levels of social and physical mobility or access to fresh food (MERCi, 2012; Interview MB160109);
 - Dig Food, a family-based organic non-certified box scheme specializing in good quality, locally sourced, organic produce.
- b. Citizens as producers:
 - Healthy Eating Local Food Partnership (HeLF), a social enterprise initiated by the community voluntary sector and funded by MFF that engages mental health service users, young people, and the community in healthy, local, food-growing, cooking and retailing activities and thus provides work-based learning opportunities, and 'moving-on' services, which help people to join mainstream society (interview RP190808);
 - Manchester Permaculture Network (MPN), a grass-roots initiative set up by local community members interested in principles of permaculture that supports several community food-growing programmes;
 - Action for Sustainable Living (AFSL), a charitable organization, and the Sustainable Neighborhoods Action Group, a pool of individuals and network groups in the community, both promoting sustainable living including local food and food growing (interview HSK020908).
- c. Producers and traders as citizens:
 - Unicorn Grocery, which sells local, organic, and fair-trade food. Owned and run by its workforce, it aims to provide fair employment conditions to its members and people with learning disabilities;
 - Glebelands Market Garden, a small cooperative run by former Unicorn workers that provides fresh, local produce to local businesses such as Unicorn and Dig Food.

Approaching Civic Food Networks in Manchester through a Moral Economy Lens

The alternative agri-food initiatives in Manchester, we will argue, constitute as a whole a contemporary moral-economic order. These initiatives are of course not to-

tally isolated from the contemporary economic system: money, in many of its different forms and applications, plays an important role in the initiatives. For example, the Herbie mobile grocers, Unicorn workers' cooperative, Glebelands market garden, Dig Food vegetable box scheme, and HeLF vegetable bag scheme all use money as a medium of exchange and common unit of measurement between non-equivalent commodities. However, money also plays a different role that goes beyond the calculative rationality of contemporary economies (Ostrom, 1990, 2009). Money is perceived not only as a medium of exchange but also as a medium with a liberatory potential, one that transforms the agri-food space into a social space for the agency of active 'food citizens' characterized by a more complex motivational structure (*ibid.*; North, 2007).

On our visit to Glebelands market garden, we spoke with one of the owners of the cooperative. According to them, their initiative's engagement with the mainstream currency system not only contributes to the satisfaction of their basic survival needs, but also works as a means for the articulation and accomplishment of personal aspirations and moral obligations with regard to the creation of a more sustainable agri-food system. Their engagement in the cash economy thereby takes on different meanings. As they said:

'We earn our living... we make a living so this makes a business... We also have a relatively clean conscience about that. It's interesting, one of the few jobs with which he has no serious ethical problems' (interview AL160109).

Thus, returning to the idea of the Greek agora, the situated market is simultaneously a space for diverse forms of sociality – for personal relations, the reproduction of community and the exchange of knowledge and opinion, but also for political action. Going beyond a capitalocentric understanding of the economic (Gibson-Graham, 1996), it displays a level of social cooperation, solidarity, mutual aid and trust among producers, retailers and consumers, suggesting the social embedding of economic relations into a complex web of social relations and a wider set of non-economic values characteristic of the pre-capitalist agri-food moral economies discussed by Polanyi (1957), Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976).

We visited MERCi and spoke with the Herbie Van coordinator. For her, the Herbie Van constitutes a social space for the development of various links and social relations among members of the local community. It thus contributes to the creation of a more humanized local trade system that is embedded in more proximal relationships and a feeling of common belonging between agri-food practitioners and consumers:

'Some of our customers don't see another person for a whole week and when they come on the van and they have a chat with the driver on the van... it's more for people's mental well-being that they actually have someone to talk to and it's a regular face, it's not just whichever person is on the check-out looking miserable because they don't want to be there' (interview MB160109).

However, this moral economy also has a number of distinctive features that mark it out from traditional, agrarian moral economies. First, in contrast to the strong 'conscience collective' of pre-capitalist agri-food societies, the civic food networks in Manchester are characterized by relations of difference. Sometimes this simply takes the form of cooperative relations among people from different backgrounds

and lifestyles coming together – for example, in community gardens, where, while participating in an array of agri-food activities such as digging, planting and mulch matting, participants exchange personal experiences and knowledge about plants, fruits and vegetables, and ways of food preparation. But sometimes it takes the form of stronger relations of mutual dependence, as producers, retailers and consumers with different knowledge, skills, personal interests and aspirations nevertheless form mutual relations of social solidarity and reciprocity, aid and trust. For example, in the cases of Glebelands market garden, Unicorn and Dig Food, producers and retailers develop cooperative relations based on a division of labour, knowledge and skills. In the cases of Unicorn, Dig Food and the Herbie Van, traders and consumers participate in transactions that are monetary but based on feelings of trust towards each other and care towards spatially or socially distant others.¹¹

The latter became prevalent in an interview with a local consumer who also worked for the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Pool initiative. His description underlined the ethical scope and moral visions embedded in his engagement with the alternative agri-food sector. For him, an additional social value becomes an important element in his justification of engagement with the conventional, monetary economic relations of exchange. Engagement in the cash economy becomes a means for not only the survival of the local practitioners, but also the social benefit of the overall local society:

‘I buy my fruit and veg from these guys, they are earning money, they live in my town, that money has gone from me in my town to them in my town and they are getting their food, they are getting their supplies... from local businesses, not big multinationals... the money is staying around me and is making my area better and the people that have money in my area will spend it in my area and the area gets better and then people want to live there and they don’t want to fight in the streets because there’s more to do’ (interview MT160109).

Second, following Tipton (1982) and Taylor (1989), we can see that civic food networks in Manchester manifest a diversification of moral styles. For example, some practices follow a consequentialist logic, in that their moral evaluation stems from the impact of their agri-food practices on proximate and distant others. However, for many citizens involved in these practices, their engagement goes beyond that logic; it is mainly expressive, a reflection of their personal moral codes, regardless of the potential real outcomes of their practices. Citizens do not act as rational individuals governed by self-interest or abstract moral codes of self-restraint, but follow an expressivist ethic based on the valorization of nature and being true to oneself. The latter was evident during our discussion with one of the key members of the Manchester Permaculture Network, who is involved in the organization of community food-growing projects in Manchester. According to her description, her involvement in permaculture methods of production is a way in which she can align her practice with her personal philosophy. As she said:

‘Working with nature is fundamental to me, not man controlling nature, that’s why we have gone so wrong on this planet... it’s a philosophical and even a spiritual thing in some ways... it’s [permaculture] also the potential to do with realizing that our relationship with food, like our relationship with nature, should be one of give and take, that we don’t only want to control what we eat’ (interview JM260808).

Third, citizens' engagement in alternative agri-food initiatives is not always simply a matter of personal lifestyle choices and moral styles and codes, but it can also be the occasion for the construction of new 'communities of affect' – elective socializations with a strong sense of belonging and shared, unwritten moral rules and norms (Horton, 2003). People involved in shared practices such as veganism, permaculture and allotment-keeping exhibit a more solidaristic style of morality, suggesting a postmodern form of mechanical solidarity through which individuals develop a collective experience of their individuality within post-traditional, affectual communities of shared practice (Hetherington, 1994; Maffesoli, 1996). Our interview with the AMAS coordinator provided us with an account of the multiple ways food and related agri-food practices can acquire a wider social and cultural meaning. According to his description, they become the context for the construction of new social relationships and development of common understanding and interests between previously distant social groups:

'Our vision is to have mass community places. You get into your own growing and come to your allotment and chat to people. We want them to be social places. It's about making them happy, it's about their social aspects' (interview KW180808).

Fourth, operating in a context of multiple moral codes, styles and evaluations, the civic food networks of Manchester also seem to open up space for the emergence of kinds of solidarity that go beyond relationships of similarity. Here we apply to the domain of food the work of Prainsack and Buyx (2011), who distinguish three 'tiers' of solidarity practices: the interpersonal level, based on the individual's recognition of their similarity with individual fellow human beings in need of assistance; the group level, characterized by actions of normalized, collective commitment towards one another; and the contractual or legal level of institutionalized solidarity operating at state and interstate level (2011, pp. 47–49). Thus, at the interpersonal level, traders and consumers engage in various agri-food practices that manifest the existence of new kinds of more culturally thick versions of imagined relations of solidarity with spatially or culturally distant others. In the case of the Herbie Van, HeLF partnership and Unicorn co-op, concepts such as 'fair price' and 'fair trade' are used to express and organize the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions related to monetary economic transactions between producers, traders and consumers. For example, with a specific focus on 'local fair trade', the HeLF's partnership's Recipe for Success underlines the way that the commodity carries a different value that is related to the principle of social justice – not only towards distant producers, but also towards members of the local community:

'Since community food projects, and local growers suffer, within the current economic climate, a Local Fairtrade premium can be added to prices of local produce, that are produced ethically and sustainable. A small premium percentage can make a big difference to the profit margins of a food enterprise... To this end a system of Local Fairtrade is recommended, meaning that local suppliers are preferred, and ethical prices are paid. There is an underlying principle of cooperation in all aspects of the project' (HeLF, 2007).

Grounded in principles of social justice, social solidarity, inclusion and fairness towards local and distant farmers, as well as vulnerable parts of the global and local

population, these initiatives actively contribute to the attachment of a wider socio-political value to the commodity through a version of Durkheim's 'religion of humanity' (Durkheim, 1951; Mauss, 1967). Based on the individual's internalization, realization and recognition of the dignity of humankind, agri-food actors actively participate in the establishment of a socially just market system, and enact a global citizenship around food, based on the creation of post-national 'imagined communities in anonymity' (Anderson, 1983).

Fifth, however, Manchester's ethical foodscape also exhibits manifestations of a more formal, institutionalized kind of solidarity, practised at an institutional level. For example, Manchester Food Futures has been central in engaging these initiatives in such a type of solidarity, mobilizing the resources and authority of local government to address issues of food inequality. In a way that echoes the structural hierarchies and dependencies of traditional agri-food moral economies, it can be seen as a new type of paternalism based on a municipal, bureaucratic socialization of risk. As discussed above, following its Community Strategy of 'making Manchester more sustainable' by 2015, Manchester Food Futures has been important in enhancing the future viability of several agri-food initiatives under investigation. However, according to the programme manager of Manchester Food Futures, social phenomena such as poverty, unequal distribution of goods and access to services, social exclusion and injustices, social and health inequalities, as well as environmental issues are also central to the moral justification of its economic strategy:

'Within the city, we have poor health statistics, low life expectancies, cancers, heart diseases... Getting people to eat a healthier diet would be a key aim of ours. [But it's also] about the protection of the local and global environment. We encourage more people to grow food, thus you don't have [greenhouse] gas emissions related to large-scale food production. And it's also about improving the local environment, its physical appearance' (interview CR090908).

Thus, by providing support and funding to various citizen-led agri-food initiatives, particularly those working with the more vulnerable parts of the population, MFF's paternalism is not only expressed in relation to the agri-food system, but it also becomes an expression of a wider project for socio-economic transformation. While this operationalizes norms characteristic of peasant agri-food moral economies such as 'the survival of the weakest' and the 'minimization of the subjective probability of the threat to starvation', it does so according to a bio-political logic of intervention into population-level phenomena with the aim to affect city-wide measures such as food poverty and carbon footprint. In all these ways, it suggests a re-conceptualization of traditional notions of 'family food security' in terms of a 'local food security' or 'community food security' discourse that incorporates concern for social and natural environments at various spatial scales.

Sixth, based on the above, it is clear that the moral economy of AAFNs does not just try to defend or restore a normative social order, but follows a transformative logic that aims to realize a normative vision involving different social relationships with and through food. In the terms of Manuel Castells, the participants do not simply have a 'resistant identity', one which tries to preserve existing moralized relations around food, but also a collective 'project identity' (Castells, 1997). In various cases, despite the heterogeneity in the practitioners' habituses, values and beliefs, the agri-food practitioners' participation in various alternative agri-food economic activities

can be seen as constituting joint political action against the market-economic logic that dominates the agri-food system. Thus, as part of the 'post-traditional morality' of the self-reflexive individual, the alternative agri-food practices can be perceived as political actions aiming at reclaiming control over the local food system, reskilling citizens, creating moral bonds with the land and ecologies, extending 'food democracy' and diminishing socio-economic inequalities. The development of Unicorn's alternative currency systems and the community gardens' informal networks of exchange are indicative of such a direction. The latter was also manifest in the interview with one of the AFSL coordinators, who is also a member of the Manchester Permaculture Network. As she explained, in various cases of community food-growing projects, the Allotments Act's strict regulations on the use of produce have also been crucial in encouraging citizens' engagement in alternative, non-monetary informal networks of exchange:

'If you have an overabundance of produce, you are not allowed to sell anything that's grown on an allotment. This is good in one way because it encourages people to think outside the box about what they can do to store vegetables or work in a more public community-spirited way and swap things' (interview HSK020909).

Thus, while, on the one hand, they could be seen as examples of group solidarity manifested in their collective commitment to work with and assist others linked by means of a shared situation or cost,¹² by going beyond the conventions of the mainstream market economy, these initiatives also become manifestations of the agri-food practitioners' aspirations for community governance and expressions of an emancipatory politics for citizen control and self-determination in relation to food. They provide the basis for the construction of proactive movements that aim not only at personal transformation, but at wider societal change that could lead to a more self-governed and community-oriented agri-food economic system. Fitting in with the concept of niches in transition theory, AAFNs can be considered as carriers of alternative techno-economic paradigms of production, distribution and consumption capable of providing solutions to crises in new political economic and environmental contexts and of strengthening social change 'from below' (Geels, 2004; Wiskerke and Ploeg, 2004; Schot and Geels, 2008). By redefining their identity and modifying their socio-technical environment, the actors involved in the agri-food initiatives challenge the dominant food regime by creating a public space where food is thought of, known about, produced and consumed according to different innovation pathways, norms and rules (Brunori et al., 2010). Thus, despite their relatively marginal role in Manchester's foodscape and their currently small-scale impact, their creation of 'utopic spaces' where ideas of the good society can be put into practice (Hetherington, 1994) suggests that they have the potential to effect a broader transformation of the agri-food landscape.

Conclusions

Our investigation of civic food networks in Manchester suggests a different way of approaching and rethinking them by employing a moral economy lens. It encourages us to think of the centrality of the moral economy in understanding their role in the contemporary agri-food system, but also to take into account the distinctive character of morality in contemporary society. As seen in our analysis, individuals

engaged in alternative agri-food practices employ different moral styles and codes depending on the different contexts, situations and social networks in which they exist and operate. In many cases, going beyond a consequentialist logic associated with an ethics of disengaged reason, they manifest a more 'expressivist' moral style based on an ethics of benevolence, compassion and self-realization, as well as a more affectual, solidaristic one, opening up some space for the expression of diverse relations of solidarity – a cooler version of 'organic solidarity', but also a more culturally thick version of it that can variously operate as an individual or collective project at an interpersonal, group or institutional level.

Thus, despite their similarities with pre-capitalist agri-food moral economies, civic food networks also seem to variously constitute part of a distinctively contemporary moral economic order. Based on the above, as well as inspired by Gibson-Graham's (1996) approach to the economy as a heterogeneous zone of cohabitation and contestation among multiple economic forms that all play important roles in the configuration of the contemporary economic system, the moral economy could be considered as a 'diverse moral-economic landscape', which, following Boltanski and Thévenot's analysis of the co-existence of different moralities in a plural world (1999), is ultimately dependent on the various moral styles and codes which constitute economic agents' moral 'worlds of justification' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999).¹³ The moral economy of the civic food networks in Manchester could be seen as part of this diverse moral agri-food economic landscape, but in a way that challenges the mainstream capitalocentric approach to it by going beyond the contemporary dominance of narrow understandings of market exchange (see Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006).

As also discussed in our analysis, various individuals in Manchester – producers, traders and consumers – have employed different agri-food practices that constitute a reflection of their personal moral order, the 'order of worth' that can justify their choices and practices (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999). Despite the apparent differences in their habituses, knowledge backgrounds, experiences, structures of feelings and moral styles and codes, citizens appeared to switch between different moral codes and styles, but also collectively construct their own communities of choice and practice linked to their common aspirations for a wider socio-economic transformation. However, their participation in AAFNs is not only a symbolic act of individual self-definition. Although, as part of the contemporary highly individuated society, contemporary self-reflexive individuals (Giddens, 1990) develop their own projects for personal transformation through which they negotiate what they value, how they organize their priorities, and choose by which codes and patterns they live their lives (Heelas, 1996), they also go beyond individuality. As shown, they develop new collective projects based on an ethics of solidarity amongst each other, as well as towards spatially and socially distant, human and non-human others.

In this context, the moral economy of civic food networks can be seen as a space that enables the emergence of new active food citizens, who, through their engagement with food, become active participants in not only shaping (cf. Hassanein, 2003), but also changing the agri-food system, and potentially increasing their future capacity to democratize it by determining agri-food policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally and globally (see Lang 1999). However, as shown by our analysis, the term 'citizens' seems to not only refer to consumers and the way they can be transformed into active agents involved in various consumption and production practices (Baker, 2004; Winson, 1993; Welsh and MacRae, 1998; DeLind, 2002; Wekerle, 2004). The category of 'citizens' also incorporates the wider spectrum of

agri-food agents – producers, traders, consumers and others – for whom this engagement becomes a reflection of their personal moral world and the life choices, as well as their visions for wider socio-economic change within the agri-food system and beyond. It becomes a project through which they aim not only to express their opposition and resistance to the dominant agri-food system, but also to construct projects of collective identity around the vision of a more autonomous, community-oriented agri-food economic system.

In all these different ways, an analysis of the moral economy of civic food networks and its embeddedness in the multiple morality of contemporary societies and individuals helps us develop a better understanding of the characteristics of the agents engaged in alternative agri-food practices. Going beyond a ‘cooler’ version of ethics of individualized and disengaged reason, they are not just rational enlightened, disembedded individuals acting according to information and an abstract ethics of justice. Grounded in the multiple morality of contemporary individuals, the contemporary ‘food citizens’ need to be approached as the more complex, embedded actors who shift between different modes of ethicality and solidarity as they move across the urban ethical foodscape.

Thus, the moral economy of civic food networks can provide a better understanding of the role of citizens in the making of the contemporary alternative agri-food landscape. It urges us to approach civic food networks as a moral economy whose potential to go beyond a marginalized niche and contribute to a wider socio-economic transformation within and beyond the agri-food system cannot be understood without taking into consideration the character of contemporary morality and the multiple and complex moral nature of the contemporary individual.

Notes

1. Recent work on the moral economy of the agri-food system also includes Busch’s work on the normative dimensions of grades and standards (Busch, 2000) and Thompson’s work on the ethics of sustainable agriculture (Thompson, 1996).
2. <<http://www.faanweb.eu>>.
3. For example, as Scott described, ‘millers and – to a greater degree – bakers were considered as servants of the community, working not for a profit but for a fair allowance’ (1976, p.83).
4. As Scott (1976) underlines, tradition has a central role in conferring the legitimacy of reciprocal relations because it promises a higher level of performance according to expectations and because it is more durable and culturally sanctioned than less institutionalized forms of security.
5. Smith did not treat economic efficiency as an absolute value, leading to inevitable improvement. Instead, he stressed the necessity of certain limitations provided by an inherent moral order and the moral regulation of social life (Evensky, 1993).
6. Booth claims that in a society that recognizes deep inequalities among its members, economic relations will be refashioned so as to bring them into harmony with the community, since all communities aim at some good for which wealth has an instrumental role to play (1994, pp. 662–663).
7. According to national statistics from 2011, Manchester has a population of 503,000 people. It is a metropolitan borough of Greater Manchester, currently the third most populous county in England with 2.2 million people.
8. Historically, Manchester grew rapidly during the nineteenth century due to the expansion of the textile industry and related manufacturing.
9. According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation of 2011, Manchester is ranked as the second most deprived local authority in England in terms of income deprivation, third in terms of employment deprivation and fifth in terms of the extent of deprivation throughout the city (Manchester City Council, 2011b).
10. For example, with regard to climate change, peak oil, food miles, food insecurity, food deserts and urban regeneration.

11. This dimension was evident in their active support of overseas producers through their trading and consumption practices.
12. This dimension is evident in the cases of mutual assistance, self-help support and seed swapping among allotment holders and community gardeners.
13. Boltanski and Thevenot (1999) claimed that we live in a plural world where actions can be justified in multiple ways depending on the people's worlds of justification. They identified six worlds of justification – domestic, industrial, civic, market, fame and inspiration – according to which different groups of people justify their actions to others.

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